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ABSTRACT

This study gathered information from 94 first-year teachers (graduates of Memorial University, Newfoundland, Canada) regarding their attitudes towards teaching, methodological and technical competencies, and the adequacy of their teacher preparation. The teachers were asked to give background information that included degree received, type of education program (primary, elementary, or high school), type of practice teaching, and length of teaching experience. The questionnaire was designed to measure teacher self-concept, motivation to teach, two personal qualities (ambition and rapport), teaching methods and techniques, classroom management procedures, the teaching environment, and perceptions of teacher preparation. Findings indicated that: (1) an extended practicum did not significantly influence any of the teachers' measured competencies; (2) motivation to teach was positively influenced by the primary-elementary degree program in college as compared to the high school program; (3) the teaching environment encountered by the first-year teacher was more important than any of the preservice experiences measured by the study; (4) administration and supervision of first-year teachers influence the way they perceive the initial teaching experience; (5) personal qualities that beginning teachers bring to their profession are important indicators of both attitudes and competencies during the first year of teaching; and (6) motivation to teach is an essential condition for the professionalization of a teacher. (JD)

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A Study of the Quality of Teaching of Beginning Teachers

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Introduction

If being a professional teacher is to have any meaning in an occupational sense then it must bear some resemblance to the traditional professions. While the traditional professional model has been modified over the centuries, there must be some common elements that serve to identify all of those things that are legitimately referred to as professions. There are many sets of definitions but they can generally be distilled into three basic categories dealing with claims to knowledge, commitment to a public service and a high level of autonomy.

In the past teacher educators have concentrated on devising pre-service programs that copy some of the aspects of the professional programs but because of time constraints and a lack of quality control these efforts have been poor imitations of the professional examples of medicine and law. Therefore there has been an emphasis on in-service teaching with many workshops and professional days devoted to institutes that promote new methods and techniques of teaching. In many instances the practising teacher is required to return to University in order to obtain a permanent certificate.

Recently there has been a new approach to the professionalization of teachers. It has been recognized that because of the short period of time available to socialize many students into the role of teacher more information needs to be gathered about the circumstances surrounding the induction into teaching. This fits into the professional pattern of residency and articling where practice is undertaken by certified professionals who have obtained a large component of their theoretical work prior to beginning their on-the-job experience. Therefore the induction into teaching might be viewed as an opportunity to prolong

the socialization into teaching while not increasing the preservice component. Much more needs to be known about the induction process before any informed judgment can be made about the efficacy of such a program.

This study proposes to gather information from first year teachers regarding their perceptions of their attitudes towards teaching, methodological and technical competencies and the adequacy of their teacher preparation. This paper will argue that there is more involved in teaching than an understanding of the subject matter and a knowledge of the appropriate techniques. This is the fourth in a series of studies investigating the attitudes and values that combine to provide predispositions of commitment to a career in teaching. Without these professional predispositions teachers cannot reasonably expect to achieve the professional status of the traditional professions. It is the task of the teacher preparation program to enhance these predispositions but it is unclear that these attitudes and values can be brought to fruition within the relatively short socialization program undertaken in most teacher education institutions.

Rationale

This study is concerned with certain aspects of the socialization process used to turn students into teachers. This process has received much attention for other professions but is not as well understood for teachers. The length of the total training program and the length of the practicum are only two of the pre-service components that vary considerably across Canada. The preservice socialization process seems

to rely very heavily on the practicum portion of the program but as Wideen (1984) bluntly states in this passage there is little research evidence to support current socialization practices.

> Presently we expose students to professors who teach courses and then place them in schools. What is the argument suggesting that these practices will produce teachers? The simple fact is, no such argument exists in a form which can be examined and tested. Such arguments or theories likely exist in the minds of people who work with students on a day to day basis. However, they have not been described, held up for examination, and tested through research. Thus, research in teacher education goes on in a theoretical vacuum. (p. 247)

Clifton and Long (1984) have recently conceptualized the socialization of teachers in a more theoretical way.

> ...the function of the educational institution is to develop the anticipatory socialization of students to such a degree that when they actually take up an occupational position within the society they have the knowledge, skills, values, norms, and self-concepts which allow them to function with a relatively high degree of success. They must not only be viewed by members of society as being authentic holders of a specific occupational role but they must also see themselves as legitimate occupants of the role. Furthermore, in order to see themselves as legitimate occupants of a role position, they must develop knowledge, ability, and motivation which are commensurate with that role position. (p. 12)

Grimmett (1984) states his concern about the socialization process by extending it to the induction of teachers into the profession. He is also seeking evidence for promoting certain practices rather than others by questioning the basis for making certain socialization decisions in the teacher education program.

> Teaching at the pre-service and induction levels must also be evaluated rigorously because important decisions about entrance to the teaching force are being taken. Yet the foundational knowledge for such evaluation is virtually non-existent. Based

> on the Haberman (1983, p. 98) premise that, while experienced teachers may be regarded exhibiting "teaching behaviour", pre-service and beginning teachers essentially manifest "learning behaviour", it is proposed that attempts be made to ascertain what criterion measures of effectiveness are appropriate to the pre-service and induction levels. Such findings would permit a more knowledgeable and equable evaluation process at both levels, quite distinct from current practice which is largely based on criteria derived from knowledge of experienced teacher effects. (p. 262)

But perhaps Tymitz-Wolf (1984) speaks more directly to the professional predisposition point in the following passage.

> As teachers, as professionals, we want them to possess special skills, but also the attitudes and motivations which will let them participate fully in the learning experiences and profes-sional development activities available to them throughout the course of their careers. Likewise, such preparation will enable them to generate more useful and interesting experiences for their own students in the years ahead. (p. 24)

Clifton and Long (1984) speak more specifically about the importance of attitudes and values in the teacher socialization process.

> ...a program of studies for education students must develop for them a conception of themselves as budding teachers and this conception must also govern various aspects of their individual behaviour. (p. 14)

Therefore it should be clear that attempts to conceptualize the socialization process are well under way. This study will shed some empirical light on the socialization process by investigating how certain pre-service activities are perceived by first year teachers in terms of their competencies attitudes as beginning professionals.

Sample

Memorial University is the only teacher education institution in the province and as a result well over ninety percent of the teachers in the province are graduates from this one faculty of education. This study sought the perceptions of inexperienced first year teachers regarding various aspects of their induction into teaching. This apparently simple task was frought with problems from the beginning including a postal strike and a teacher dispute.

In the Spring of 1983 a list of first year teachers was obtained from the Department of Education This was matched with the list of graduates in education for the preceding year. From this pairing process it was anticipated that a list of first year teachers could be obtained for the study. This assumption proved to be incorrect because roughly thirty percent of the 571 graduates in 1983 were already experienced teachers. After sorting out these problems and dealing with the postal strike, 186 questionnaires were mailed just before Easter to first year teachers who were employed for the first time and 94 usable responses were submitted for a return rate of fifty percent.

In 1984 the list of employed teachers was matched with only those students who had completed the student teaching practicum. This was done to avoid the problem of surveying experienced teachers which was encountered in the previous year. In 1984, 169 questionnaires were distributed just prior to a teacher dispute and 49 usable responses were submitted for a return rate of twenty three percent. In 1983 it was possible to obtain additional responses by a persistent follow-up campaign which was not feasible in the second year. Because of the

relatively small numbers it was decided to combine the two samples giving a total of 143 usable responses from a group of 355 questionnaires for an overall return rate of forty percent. Another limitation of the study is that it relied entirely on self reported questionnaires. Because these first year teachers are on probation it was decided that it would be inappropriate to ask the supervisors to evaluate these teachers on such sensitive areas as teacher competencies and teaching environment. Self reporting was seen as the best way to gather this information and the least likely to bias the research especially concerning the emphasis on attitudes and values.

Methodology

The first year teachers were identified by a code and were sent questionnaires via their school address. In each instance the teacher was asked to give background information about age, sex, marital status, degree received, type of education program (primary, elementary or high school) type of practice teaching and length of teaching experience. In addition to this background information the questionnaire contained groups of questions designed to measure teacher self concept, motivation to teach, two personal qualities (ambition and rapport), teaching methods and techniques, classroom management procedures, the teaching environment and perceptions of their teacher preparation. Each questionnaire took approximately 20 minutes to complete. Following the data collection a multiple regression analysis was run to determine the weighting of the seven composite variables and their significance to one another.

The Dependent Variables

Following a preliminary analysis three dependent variables emerged as viable after dropping a fourth (self concept) due to a lack of reliability. The self-concept composite had only four items that loaded above .59 and the alpha reliability was .53. The three remaining dependent variables were motivation to teach, teaching methods and techniques and classroom management procedures. These three dependent variables were constructed from a group of questionnaire items varying from seven to nine. Each composite variable was factor analyzed using principal component solutions where the item was considered adequate if the factor loading was .59 or greater (Nunnally, 1967, p. 315). Unidimensional scales were constructed by adding the weighted items together so that only one factor was extracted from each set of items.

The measure of motivation to become a teacher was constructed by summing six Likert-like items obtained from a previous study (Covert and Clifton, 1983). The loadings on the principal component were .59 or greater and the alpha reliability coefficient for the variable was .81. The items scoring well were questions about being highly motivated to teach, having a strong desire to continue in the profession, liking being a teacher very much and a belief that I am a very competent teacher.

The classroom management measure was composed of eight questions that were collected from various sources and proved to be very successful. All eight of the items had loadings on the principal component of .59 or greater and the alpha reliability coefficient for the variable was .85. Questions included in this variable referred to a possession of adequate oral, written and nonverbal communication skills, control of

student disruption, use of teaching strategies and use of classroom activities.

The final dependent variable was a measure of teaching methods and techniques. These items were also chosen from various sources and all nine questions proved to be effective. In each case the loadings on the principal component was .59 or greater and this too had an alpha reliability of .85. Questions about possession of a repertoire of teaching strategies and an ability to locate and use teaching resources effectively combined with items about use of learning strategies and evaluation of student work to comprise this composite variable.

In choosing these as the dependent variables it was argued that these variables would logically be the result of such preceding variables as teacher preparation, personal qualities of the teacher and the teaching environment of the school. It seems quite unlikely that teaching methods and techniques and classroom management procedures would be available to teachers prior to their participation in the teacher education program. That is the kind of degree program they choose, the extent of the practicum and the school environment in which they teach would all effect the classroom management and techniques rather than the other way around. In addition it is claimed that the student brings certain personal characteristics to the program which influences his motivation to teach as well as the two competencies described. More specifically the teachers' rapport with students and administrators and their expression of ambition will effect their motivation to teach and their ability to teach. It should be noted that there would be an obvious interaction between and among the three dependent variables as

well as the independent variables cited. However, the organization of the latent and observable independent variables in the path analysis diagram as indicated is the most logical and effective means of obtaining appropriate measures the dependent variables.

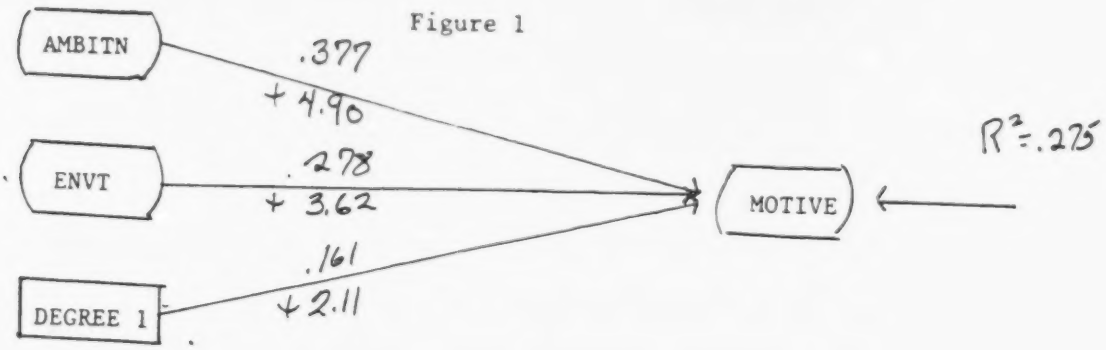
In constructing the questionnaire it was proposed that three kinds of things would influence the attitudinal (motivation and self concept) and competency (classroom management and teaching method and technique) measures. These three included the nature of the preparation program (degree, practicum and perception of program), the personal qualities that the teachers bring to the profession (rapport and ambition) and the school environment where the teacher induction takes place. The model which emerged indicated that three of the dependent variable measures were significant but that self concept measure lacked reliability. However when considering the independent variables the teaching environment and the personal qualities of the teachers had far more effect on the perception of teacher success than did the teacher preparation program.

Results

In examining the results of the study perhaps the most effective method would be to use path analysis model, where for each independent variable the t values are shown below the standardized partial regression coefficient. In each instance t values of 2.0 or greater are significant at the $p = .05$ level. The motivation to teach was significantly influenced by one variable from each of the three categories. Of these three the personal quality ambition was the most important with a correlation of .377 and a t value of 4.90. The teaching environment was the second

most important influence on motivation with a correlation of .278 and a t value of 3.62. The least important of the significant variables was related to those who received a primary-elementary degree. The positive correlation in this instance was .161 with a t of 2.11. These relationships are depicted in figure one.

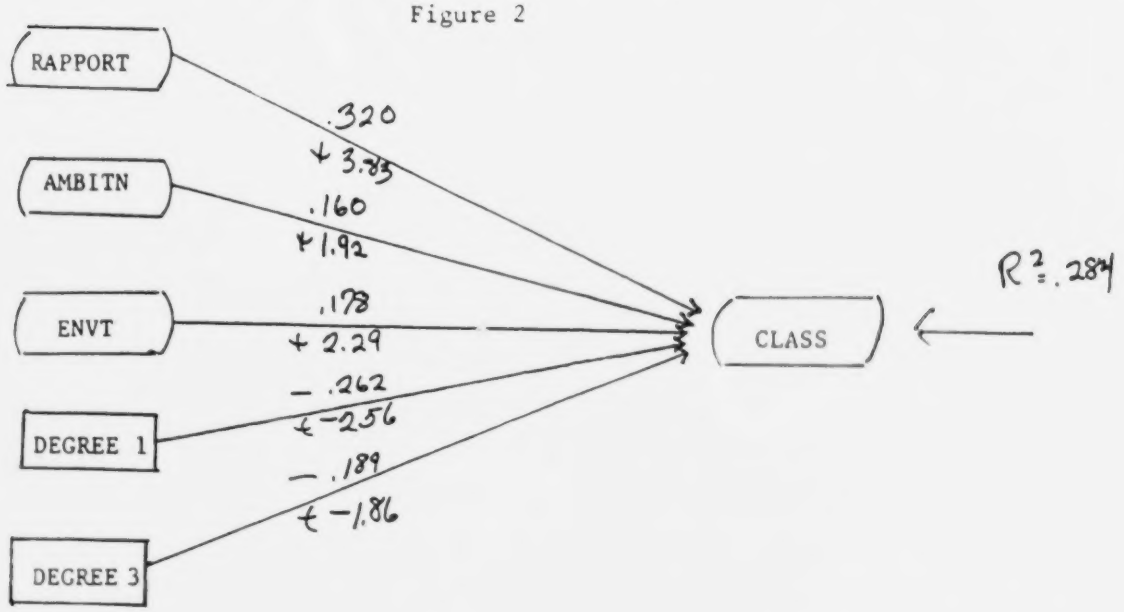
Figure 1



The classroom management procedures variable was influenced by five independent variables representing all three categories once again. Both of the personal qualities were significant indicators of classroom management with rapport having a correlation of .320 an t value of 3.83, twice as important as ambition at .160 with a t value of 1.92. Teaching environment was once again a significant indicator with a correlation coefficient of .178 and a t value of 2.29. The teacher preparation program chosen by the teacher has a negative value in both the primary-elementary degree program with a negative correlation of -.262 t value -2.56, and the high school programs other than liberal arts (i.e., music, science and physical education) also showing a

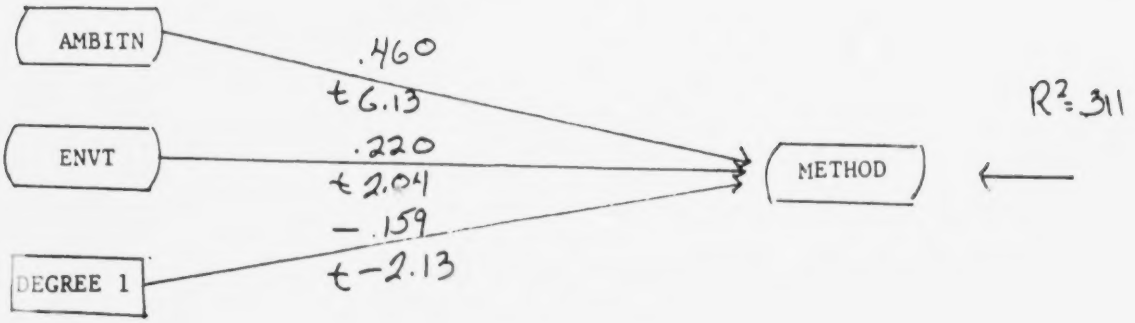
negative correlation of -.189, with a t value of -1.86. This relationship is indicated in figure two.

Figure 2



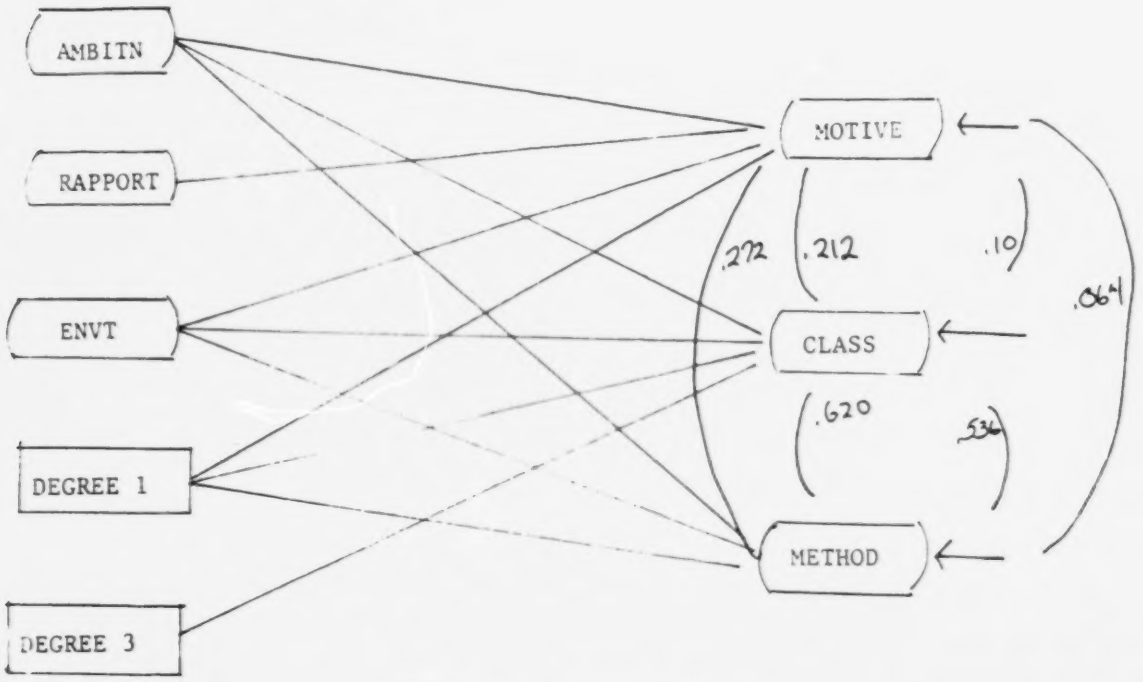
The final independent variable considered is teaching methods and techniques. Again, there are three independent variables with one from each category proving to be significant. The personal quality is once again the most important with ambition having a correlation of .460 and a t value of 6.13. The teaching environment was again seen to be important with a correlation of .220 and a t value of 2.04. The primary-elementary program has a negative value of -1.59, t value of -2.13 indicating that teachers graduating from the liberal arts conjoint high school program are more confident of their teaching methods and techniques than those graduating from the primary-elementary degree program. This relationship is indicated in figure three.

Figure 3



By combining these three models it is possible to get an integrated model where five of the independent variables help to specify the three dependent variables. This final path analysis diagram is represented in figure four.

Figure 4



A summary of the statistical methods used in this study would include the factor analysis that permitted a weighting of the various items in each composite that allowed for the most parsimonious use of the items for the description of each of seven variables. These composite variables and the other descriptor variables were then submitted to an SPSSX multiple regression procedure to determine which of the independent variables were the best descriptors of the four dependent variables. It was determined that only five of the original thirteen independent variables were significant descriptors of the three emergent dependent variables and these relationships are indicated in figures one through four. A Ridge Regression Analysis was run on the final model to determine the amount of covariance present in each of the variables in the integrated model.

Discussion

This study is an extension of three similar studies conducted with student teachers concerning their perceptions of certain attitudes and values associated with the professionalization of teachers. In the current study two of the attitudes are retained (self concept and motivation) and two other attitudinal measures are added, ambition and rapport. Measures of teaching environment, teaching methods and techniques and classroom management procedures were included because this study will deal with first year teachers rather than student teachers. While the former studies were concerned mainly with length of practicum and its influence on the attitudes of student teachers, the current study

examines the induction into teaching and has much less emphasis on the practicum.

It was initially proposed that three kinds of factors would influence the attitudes and competencies indicated as dependent variables. Concerns about the nature of the pre-service program were foremost because they would be the ones most likely to be under the control of the faculty. It was anticipated that the length and nature of the practice teaching program would influence the attitudes and competencies under investigation. Over eighty percent of the first year teachers had experienced a practicum of three weeks while the remaining twenty percent had taken an internship of thirteen weeks. While there is considerable controversy about the effect of the extended practicum on the attitudes of perspective teachers, (Covert and Clifton, 1983) there is much evidence to support the notion that longer practica improve the competencies examined in this study, i.e., teaching methods and techniques and classroom management procedures.

The current study indicates that the length of practicum does not have a significant influence on any of the dependent variables. This finding is contrary to the trend indicated in the previous three studies in this research series which found that a longer practicum generally depressed the attitudes toward teaching measured in all four studies, i.e., self-concept as a teacher and motivation to become a teacher. The bulk of the research and the weight of common sense would propose that teaching competencies of first year teachers to be improved by a longer practicum. But while these teachers generally favored a longer

practicum, this study did not find that the extended practicum significantly influenced any of the measured competencies.

The other portion of the preservice program that was of concern to the researchers in this study was the difference between the High School Program and the Primary-Elementary Program. As in many Canadian Universities the High School Preservice Program is a one year teacher education taken following the completion of a Bachelor degree. In essence, there is only one year of socialization available for persons intending to become High School teachers. At Memorial, High School teachers typically complete all of their methods and foundations courses as well as the practicum in one year. The situation is quite different for the primary-elementary students however, because they are admitted to the faculty in their second year of university and have a three year socialization process. If the socialization process were working well it would be anticipated that the primary-elementary program would graduate teachers with greater confidence in their pedagogical competencies than those in the High School Program. In addition it would be expected that the first-year teachers who had undergone a longer socialization process would have more positive attitudes toward their chosen profession than those who had contemplated their career choice for only one year.

The findings of this study indicate that the dependent variable, motivation to teach, was positively influenced by the primary-elementary degree program where compared to the High School Program. Even though this was the least significant factor effecting the motivation to teach it was significant and in a positive direction. While it is not clear which part of the degree program promoted this positive attitude it

appears as though first year teachers who have finished the primary-elementary program are more motivated to do well as a teacher than those who have completed the High School Program.

The second set of factors considered were those that influenced the teaching environment of first year teachers in the schools. It was proposed that the interaction between beginning teachers with administrators and more senior teachers would have an effect on teacher motivation and teacher competency. Twelve items were included dealing with the teaching environment of the school and eight scaled well enough to be used to construct the the variable. Seven of the items had factor loadings of .63 or greater and the alpha reliability coefficient was .86, the eighth factor had a loading of .51. The questions used to construct this composite included items about how well teachers and administrators work together, whether new teachers are consulted, encouraged and praised for their initiatives and whether first year teachers are encouraged to participate in professional growth activities.

This independent composite variable was a common indicator of all three of the dependent variables and in each instance was the second most significant category to be identified. Therefore the teaching environment encountered by the first year teacher is more important than any of the pre-service experiences measured by this study. Perhaps more attention should be given to the interaction that takes place within the schools when considering the induction of beginning teachers. This study indicates that the more positive the teaching environment the greater the first year teachers motivation to teach. Perhaps even more interesting is the relationship between the first year teachers'

perception of their environment and their perceived abilities to utilize their teaching methods and techniques and successfully employ their classroom management procedures. In examining the management composite the school environment was not as important as the degree program, variable but when considering teaching methodology the environment variable was much more influential than the measures taken of the degree program. Therefore it would appear that the administration and supervision of first year teachers is important in the way that the first year teacher perceives the initial teaching experience. It could be argued that this relationship is greater than preservice experiences because of its immediacy but even if this is the case the role of the administrator should not be overlooked in examining the induction of beginning teachers.

The third category of independent variables examined includes those that were classed as personal qualities by this study. The questionnaire was originally constructed to measure one set of personal factors measured by ten items but when the factor loadings were examined it became apparent that two distinct items emerged. Therefore the two personal quality composite variables were constructed from fewer items. In the first instance four items combined to form the variable called ambition. The factor loadings were no lower than .54 and the alpha reliability coefficient was .70. The items included in the ambition measure referred to high levels of motivation and dedicated, a strong desire to be successful, and not being easily discouraged. The second personal quality that emerged was a measure called rapport. This composite variable had a factor or loading of greater than .57 and an alpha

reliability of .66. This composite variable was composed of items concerning an ability to be cooperative and tolerant, as well as negotiating compromises and responding to criticism.

The personal qualities proved to be the most significant indicators of the dependent variables in all three cases. While it seems quite likely that the persons who will be the most highly motivated will also be those who are the most ambitious, however, it is not as clear that ambition should be the most significant factor when considering the first year teachers perceived competencies. In considering teaching methods and techniques ambition proved to be more than twice as important as the teaching environment and even more important than the degree program taken. While ambition was the most significant factor for classroom management procedures, the other personal quality rapport proved to be by far the most significant factor in this other competency measure. Therefore in each instance the personal qualities that beginning teachers bring to their profession appear to be the most important indicators of both attitudes and competencies during that first year of teaching. These personal qualities may be enhanced by the teacher preparation program but they may be considered to be qualities that should be selected for when students begin their training program.

The motivation to teach is an essential condition for the professionalization of a teacher. This attitude is significantly influenced by the ambition that the first year teacher has as part of their personality. Even more surprising is the influence of ambition and rapport on the two measured competencies of first year teachers. It would be anticipated that these personal qualities would be promoted during the

transition from student to teacher but this is true in only one instance at Memorial. The longer socialization of the primary-elementary coincides with the positive personal quality of ambition to promote motivation. This indicates that the three year socialization process is beneficial in promoting positive attitudes when compared to the one year program of the High School teachers.

Perhaps the most disturbing finding is that the longer socialization program of the primary elementary teachers proves to have a negative impact on the measured teacher competencies of classroom management procedures and teaching methods and techniques. In both of these instances the personal qualities are the most important indicators of perceived competency but in both instances the longer socialization program is negatively correlated with the development of these competencies. Therefore even though there is a high positive correlation between the personal qualities and the teacher competencies, there is a negative correlation between these competencies and having taken the longer more pedagogically involved three year education program for the primary-elementary teachers. It is difficult to explain how those first year teachers who have had only one year of teacher training can perceive themselves to be more competent first year teachers than those who have had three years of a teacher education program. Especially when the personal qualities in each instance account for such a large part of the variance.

It might be argued that because the high school teachers are dealing primarily with their area of major concentration they are more confident than those teachers who have to deal with many subjects and

children far younger than themselves. It could be said that first year teachers experiencing students far different from their most recent student experiences feel less competent than those who deal with high school students only a few years removed from their own experience. It could also be that the longer socialization period is not concentrating on those things that beginning teachers need most be feel comfortable in their initial position. While it might be argued that first year teachers undergoing the primary elementary program are more motivated and have positive attitudes toward their teaching, they do not perceive themselves to be adequately prepared to teach these grades when compared to those who are teaching in the high school.

While it is difficult to deal with this perplexing finding one thing should be clear. Personal qualities are important indicators of professional attitudes and competencies. It is not clear from this research that these qualities are enhanced by the teacher education program therefore it might be said that perspective teachers should be selected for admission on the basis of these criteria. It could be argued that students either have these personal qualities when they begin the program or at least have predispositions to develop these qualities and they should be selected with these tendencies in mind. Furthermore it is not clear that a longer practicum or a longer teacher training program is necessarily better for the promotion of teacher competencies. When compared to the one year high school teacher education program, the primary-elementary program that has significantly more education courses and a prolonged socialization process, proved to be much less effective in promoting perceptions of teacher competency in first year teachers.

It might also be claimed that the introduction into teaching is such a traumatic experience that it is not unusual that the first year teachers feel incompetent and ill-prepared in terms of teaching methods and techniques even though they are highly motivated to teach. They have positive attitudes but feel an inability to cope with the basic tasks of everyday teaching. Perhaps when they become more experienced they will feel more competent and then their attitudes will also change.

The current study now in the data collection stage will compare these attitudes and competencies with teachers who have had seven years of experience. It will be interesting to see if the beginning teachers and their experienced counterparts have similar attitudes and values. It is anticipated that their views about their teacher preparation program will differ and that they will have fewer concerns about competencies but more regarding professional attitudes.

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